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## Introduction to **A Spiral Walk Through the Golden Mean**

By Leslie Ullman

From the marginal doodles that curve from wrist to pen and bring a sense of kinetic pleasure as one sits on the phone or at a meeting, to the giant ground drawings of Ancient Nasca in Peru, the spiral has made its way, often mysteriously, to surfaces familiar to us. It is not a static shape even when represented two-dimensionally; it invites us to touch, to trace, to travel. Phenomena such as labyrinths and the Spiral Jetty, a contemporary and often-submerged work of landscape art located at one end of Utah's Great Salt Lake, pull us into the paths they etch, and they gain dimension as the elements etch layers of another history onto them. The dance form known as Contact Improvisation teaches both bodies to move in spirals in order to maintain their connection, and restorative practice of Tai Chi opens the muscles and refines balance through a sustained flow of spiral movements. Motion, process, and the passage of time are inherent to the nature of spiral. It is holographic and endlessly compelling.

The spiral has also surfaced, in the form of shells and fossils, from underwater, underground, and deep history. Walk into any gem store and you'll see them, especially the Nautilus ancestors known as ammonites, polished and gleaming under lights. When they are sliced, the flat inner side reveals a plate of chambered segments spiraling outward to chronicle an ancient creature's expansion of its home. Over a period of 350 million years, these chambers have filled with hardened sediment, compressed time, forming an inlay of earth tones as intricate and lovely as anything made by an artist. I have been unable to resist acquiring a large number of them. I've made some

into pendants to wear, sell, and give away, an activity which has given me the oddly pleasant feeling of being a conduit rather than an owner or creator.

Recently, a friend who owns one of the pendants observed that the ammonite's appeal can be explained, in part, by the fact that its proportions replicate the ideal proportions established by the Pythagorean-Platonic theory of numbers known as the Golden Mean. This observation set me, a writer trained almost exclusively in the Liberal Arts, on a foray through the Internet to learn something of the language of mathematics. The foray now has become a spiral in its own right, giving me an increasingly expansive understanding of the workings of nature, art, and especially of *process* in all its momentum and mystery.